

I write to you as a former employee of Turner Broadcasting, as an amateur radio operator, and as a concerned citizen who sees further media consolidation in this country as a dangerous concentration of power. This danger is far more of a threat to our nation's security than are backpacks in subways.

Further consolidation in the cable industry is a clear violation of horizontal ownership rules that must be re-established to serve the public interest. Although we have more channels available than ever before, they are under the operation of a handful of giant corporations--and, in effect, under Republican and/or conservative Christian control.

If Comcast and Time Warner are allowed to merge with Adelphia, the two companies will control nearly 50 percent of the national market. This level of concentration in the cable industry will lead to higher consumer rates and lower quality service. One need only look at the gutting of CNN's editorial division since the Time Warner/AOL mergers to see how media concentration puts the public's right to know, as well as quality programming, at risk. The editorial content and quality at the news division has declined steadily under megacorporate control (and its attendant political plum status).

Since passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and the "deregulation" of cable, consumers have seen their rates jump an average of 59 percent — with some areas experiencing even more dramatic increases.

We viewers are required to buy channels we don't want or need in "bundles" not of our own choosing. For example, many of these are "religious" channels that feature conservative Christian doctrine; several of these run simultaneously in the Atlanta market. However, Comcast dragged its feet and has provided vague promises rather than presentation of Logo, the only basic-cable, professionally-produced LGBT channel addressing the lives and concerns of lesbian and gay viewers, who make up a large market segment in metro Atlanta. (Meanwhile, the mandated programming of misspelled crawls and graphics advertise the illiteracy of our county's school system.) While some people might claim offense at seeing lesbians and gay men in non-stereotypical roles, they have the right AND the responsibility to use their much-vaunted "parental control" technology. They do NOT have the right to keep others from seeing the channel. An alternative might be to let consumers pick and choose the channels they DO want, with certain

guarantees that channels for underserved market segments (e.g., the LGBT community, Spanish speakers, etc.) remain available.

At the same time, the cost of cable modem service remains out of reach for many households, holding constant for years and selectively underserving rural and low-income Americans. This is ironic, considering that cable TV began as a means of bringing news and information TO rural areas.

The American people are watching the digital divide widen even as the need for access to high-speed networks increases. No matter what the industry says, no one needs to see movie trailers on his or her cellphone. What a foolish waste of bandwidth! To make matters worse, greed over BPL has these conglomerates trying to commandeer the nation's vital amateur radio spectrum. Recall that, when commercial TV, radio and cell towers disintegrated in the World Trade Center attack on 9/11, it was the nation's highly trained and dedicated network of amateur radio operators who kept vital emergency communications open.

Cable companies have become less responsive to the needs and requirements of communities. The quality of public accountability in local franchise agreements has declined, as big companies leverage their power to squeeze local governments.

In many communities, the truly independent sources of local news, information and culture come from the public channels produced at the local access centers. Unfortunately, local channels lack the resources to produce the programming that citizens want and need, and tend to be monopolized by religious programmers, as if there were not sufficient religious programming already available. Most local offerings amount to a free pass for any storefront preacher who wants to offer exponentially-redundant programming.

But we all know this really isn't about access TV programming, that ancient battleground. Though an important potato, it's a small one.

This is really about the corporate boards of media giants like Time Warner bowing to media control from the Pentagon ("embedded troops"), retaliating against corporate whistleblowers, and gutting top-of-the-business news teams through attrition, firings, layoffs, and enforced early retirement. Ask

any of the REAL journalists who were let go in the CNN bloodbaths. I suspect partisan politics had more to do with this wholesale suppression of information from the public. Rupert Murdoch's FOX, a/k/a GOP TV, can afford to flaunt its partisanship, however disingenuously, as can the charlatans who are attempting to stage a coup at PBS/CPB by alleging " liberal bias."

When it comes to genuine news programming, this country is in great danger from terrorists within--those whose weapon is rhetorical sleight-of-hand and would wipe their rear ends with the First Amendment before rolling it up and tossing it on the nation's doorstep.

I am not exaggerating when I say that media concentration of the sort proposed by Comcast, Time Warner and Adelphia is Stalinism in capitalists' clothing. I saw what happened when Romanian TV freed itself from government control. The fact that we in the United States are heading the other way sickens me to my core.